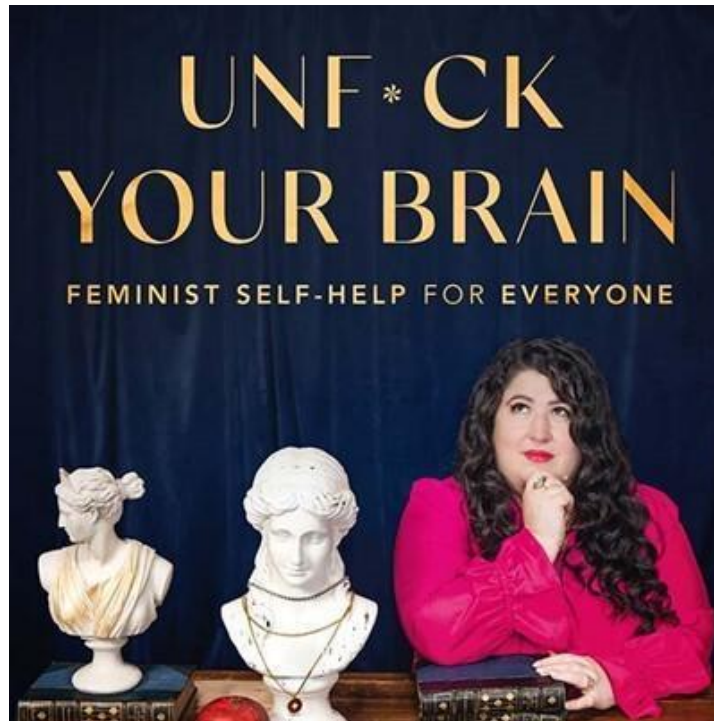


UFYB 275: Three Myths About Self-Love



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Kara Loewentheil

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Welcome to *Unf*ck Your Brain*. I'm your host, Kara Loewentheil, Master Certified Coach and founder of The School of New Feminist Thought. I'm here to help you turn down your anxiety, turn up your confidence, and create a life on your own terms. One that you're truly excited to live. Let's go.

Hello, my chickens. So last week we talked about the three myths about love. So if you missed that episode you should listen to that episode, it's good if I do say so myself. And I talked about the three myths about love being that other people determine if we love them, that other people can feel if we love them or not, why don't people make us feel loved. And that if you love somebody you have to act a certain way about it. So I bust those three myths, broke them down Talked about them on last week's episode.

This week we're going to talk about three myths about self-love. So that podcast last week was really about three myths about love in general but mostly love with other people. And today we're talking about self-love because if you've listened to the podcast for a while you know I talk about self-love a lot and I think it is the antidote to a lot of our self-created mental and emotional suffering. But like any concept, we can misunderstand and misuse self-love. And so I want to talk about what happens when we get self-love confused.

I'm going to teach you what I think self-love is by teaching you the three things I think it's not. And these are kind of the three main myths about self-love that I really want to caution you to watch out for because when we fall into these three common myths about self-love we're pursuing something there really is not self-love at all or we're expecting self-love to do things that it really can't do. And so I want you to really understand what self-love is and isn't.

And I find that these myths pop up at different stages of the thought work journey so I'm kind of going to go through them in order and talk about

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each of the myths and sort of how they can build on each other as you're going through the journey of discovering that self-love is even a thing and maybe a thing you would want to do. And then as you progress how you start to relate to the idea. So wherever you are in this journey if you are brand new to this work then this is going to completely resonate with you in the first point.

But if you, even if you're a coach, even if you're a master coach, I still work on this stuff, the parts, myths two and three, especially myth three is going to really hit you are where you are, so something for everybody.

Okay, so here's what happens first. When people first start doing thought work or they first discover the idea of self-compassion and I talk about self-love. There is also self-compassion, self-acceptance. I think these ideas are like a Venn diagram, they're not completely identical but I think the myths about them are pretty similar. And so if one of them resonates more for you, use that one, that's fine.

But when people first start working on some aspect of this, of their relationship with themselves or people first discover they have a relationship with themselves and they first discover the idea of just being nicer to themselves, whatever you call that, they often feel resistant to it. And they may not be totally conscious of the resistance but they often kind of will roll their eyes or they think it sounds foolish or self-indulgent. And that's because we've been raised in a culture that doesn't really understand what self-love even is.

Most of patriarchy in our society depends on women not thinking well of themselves. Patriarchy depends on women seeing themselves as inadequate and depending on other people's validation to feel okay about themselves. And that means that women's self-love is dangerous to our existing kind of social systems and norms. And that's true for any system of oppression. Fat people loving themselves disrupts fatphobia. Women of

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color loving themselves disrupts white supremacy and on and on with any marginalized group. And it's not in some vague woo-woo way.

Self-love is not all you need but all revolutionary activity, all social change comes from the deep understanding that you are worth more than what the culture has told you and that you are not actually inferior like you've been taught. So this is such an important point because sometimes when I talk about self-love as a kind of social and political act. The critique you will kind of hear is that it's just like that's just like naval gazing or it's taking kind of political action and making it just about you personally in your life like that takes away from communal action.

And I just think that's such a misunderstanding of how the human brain works. Any idea that changes the world comes from a person's brain. If we see inequalities in the world and we want to change them our ideas for how to do that comes from our brain. And when you're dealing with any kind of system of oppression, any kind of bigotry, prejudice, whatever bias, the people at the bottom, the people who are being marginalized are being taught that they are not worthwhile.

That's the whole message. You're worse than, you're less than, you're less important, you're bad, you're not good enough, here's what's wrong with you. So to refute those messages, to rewire your brain to accept and even love yourself if you are a marginalized person in one identity or many is the genesis that everything else will come from. You have to do that to even be able to stand up to that world and say, "You know what, that's not fucking true." What you've told me about myself is not true. I don't accept it. I reject that message, I'm going to believe something else. Everything flows from that.

And just like I talk about all the time, we can intellectually believe I'm good enough, sexism is wrong, racism is wrong, fatphobia is wrong, there's nothing wrong with me. We can intellectually believe that but if we haven't

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done the deep rewiring then all of that original socialization we got is still impacting our brains. So we are socialized with a bunch of ideas about why self-love is dangerous or stupid which is also kind of hilarious because we're taught it can be both. It's stupid and naval gazing but also it's very dangerous and if you love yourself you'll become a terrible person.

It's like, how is it supposed to be both? It's so silly it's not important, don't bother with it but also it's so dangerous you shouldn't do it. Society teaches women not to like themselves and then just in case they happen to encounter the concept that we might like ourselves, it teaches us that that's foolish or dangerous. So that's really myth number one which is that self-love will lead to bad outcomes. And there is a range of bad outcomes that we consciously or subconsciously think that self-love may create for us.

So we're taught that self-love means being arrogant and mostly women are taught that. And since women are socialized to be humble our idea of arrogance means thinking that we might be good at anything at all or just thinking we possibly might be worthy of existing without constantly justifying our worth and value to other people. That's our idea of being arrogant is thinking that maybe we're allowed to ever want or do anything without justifying it to the audience of critics in our brain.

Most of the time our idea of arrogance is so warped that it's actually just basic self-acceptance and self-respect. And the acknowledgement that we might not be trash in every way. And we are also taught that if we like ourselves too much then we won't see our flaws 'accurately'. And accurately is in quotation marks because I have a couple of thoughts about this. First of all who even determines what it means to see our faults accurately? Really think about this.

We take it for granted, I shouldn't like myself too much then I won't see that I am selfish or lazy or I talk too much or I'm not a good friend or whatever.

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Who decided what those faults were? The dominant culture is founded on women hating themselves and trying to serve and please everyone else in order to gain a brief respite in our brains from constant self-criticism. I don't think I want to use the rules of that culture to determine what my flaws are, what my faults are because that would say that it's a flaw that I didn't want to have children.

It's a flaw that I don't want to take care of everyone around me at my own expense. It's a flaw that I think my ideas are worth talking about. It's a flaw that I might think I'm good enough. I just don't accept those standards. When you think about the flaws that you believe you have where did you get these ideas? Who told you that that was a thing about you and that that was a flaw? Did the person who told you that, see you in a positive regard or were they already very critical of you? Or did you just absorb this from a society that is critical of almost anyone?

Think about someone you love and respect and think is awesome, if they say something that indicates that they like themselves do you immediately worry that that must mean that they don't see their flaws well enough? You only think about that if you're already fixated on their flaws. So this whole concept of we won't see our flaws accurately I just want to question all of that. Who determined what your flaws were, who taught you that? And why is that the first thing that comes to mind if we might like ourselves?

And then on top of that, secondly, why does that matter? Why do we need to be constantly aware of all of our flaws at every moment? Is that even really necessary? And I think that the whole reason we think it's important to be conscious of our flaws all the time is because we've been taught this idea that if we like ourselves we will become narcissistic and self-obsessed. That is what society teaches women. And this is not a danger that we really threaten men with.

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I don't think we say to me, "If you like yourself at all or think you're at all worthy of existing you will become an intolerable raging narcissist." That's not what we tell them. We worry about women liking themselves because if women really liked themselves that might distract them from doing everything for everyone else to feel just a little bit okay. In addition to that, I just don't think it's accurate. I don't believe and I have not experienced that if you like yourself you become self-obsessed, in fact, it's the exact opposite.

People who are self-loathing are the most self-obsessed. Let's say that again because this is really important. People who think really critically about themselves think about themselves way more often than people who like themselves. When you hate yourself you are fucking constantly thinking about yourself, how you look, what you ate, what you said the other day. Are you good enough at your job? Does your boss hate you? What about that person from third grade who was mean to you? Why don't your parents accept you well?

When you hate yourself you're constantly thinking about yourself and what's wrong with you. And you're running every interaction you have with other people through the lens of whether it validates you or rejects you. You're self-obsessed when you hate yourself. When you like yourself you actually don't think that much about yourself at all. Think about someone you like, when they come to mind you feel warm towards them, you have a positive thought about them and then you move on to like what's for lunch. You don't obsess about them.

The same is true for you if you like yourself. If you like yourself then when you occasionally come to your mind you're like, cool, I like her or him or them or whoever. You don't obsess about it. So this is so important because there is this paradox where we tell people that if they like themselves they'll become self-obsessed and never think about anyone else. But it's the exact opposite. When you don't like yourself you are

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thinking about yourself all the time. And you are way less able to think about other people.

You may think about other people in the sort of people-pleasing, manipulative way where you're trying to use them to get validation or make sure they're not mad at you because then you'd hate yourself. You're not able to actually just think about them clearly and cleanly for their own sake. When you like yourself you have so much more energy to actually care about other people because they're not just a reflection of you or something you're trying to manipulate to feel safe or okay.

And then I think finally, we believe that it's dangerous to like ourselves because we're told basically to link our self-negativity to our ambition and our productivity.

So number one, we take for granted that we should be productive. We have many other podcasts about that. But even let's take that for granted that you want to be productive, we're so used to driving ourselves with self-criticism that we think that if we actually like ourselves and believe we are good at anything or inherently worthwhile we won't accomplish anything.

So number one, that's circular. If you're accomplishing things just to feel good about yourself and you feel good about yourself without accomplishing things, then you don't need to accomplish them. If you're going to the store to get food but there's food in the house then it's not a problem that you can't get to the store. But more importantly, this conflates something that I think is correlated and not causal. So what that means is we think, well, I have been mean as shit to myself this whole time and I have accomplished x, y, z, whatever I've accomplished in my life.

It must be that the being mean to myself caused me to make the accomplishments but that's not true. I actually think that the being mean to

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yourself has held you back from what you could have accomplished. We don't say, "Well, I have accomplished all these things while also having brown hair and brown eyes. So I guess those caused the accomplishments." No, they had nothing to do with it. And when it comes to negative self-talk it's not even just neutral.

I think it actively is holding you back. I think it's like a weight tied to your ankle that you didn't even know you were pulling as you ran the race. And my experience has been that when I worked on the way that I talked to myself and the way I thought about myself my impact on the world just got bigger and my capacity to accomplish things got so much bigger. I created an entire multiple seven-figure business that employs a dozen other people and helps women all over the world for free on this podcast. I have students and clients in my programs.

This huge impact that I have created, I was only able to create when I stopped being mean to myself all the time. So that's myth number one, that self-love is dangerous or bad. So once people find thought work they start self-coaching. They listen to the podcast or they work with me in *The Clutch*. They learn everything I just talked about. They learn why those are myths and they leave those beliefs behind and they sort of are like, "Okay, I actually do want to like or love myself. I understand that this is actually going to benefit me in the world, it's not bad."

Then what happens is often they develop a new set of myths about self-love. So this is the middle stage. What happens is people substitute self-love to take the place of any goal they had before and then they treat it the same way. They treat self-love as a thing they should do or are supposed to do and it's like a race that they're trying to win. And as a perfectionist fantasy that they can shame themselves for not reaching it. So it sounds ironic to shame yourself for not having perfect self-love. But I absolutely see people doing this all the time and I coach on it all the time.

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Before thought work, people had something else in mind that once they accomplished it or had it or experienced it they think they'd never have to feel bad again. It's some other thing they're trying to do. And then they substitute self-love for that unconsciously and they start to believe that if they just love themselves they'd never have to feel bad again. And they sort of believe, well, if I had perfect self-love then I'd never feel insecure or lonely or sad or bad about myself.

The same way they used to think if I just was a size four or if I just made a 100 grand a year in my business or if I just was married or if I finally get divorced, whatever it is. We just so want to believe that there's an escape from the human experience and we will turn anything into that. I see this happening with nervous system work too. I am 100% behind nervous system literacy but I see how it gets turned into this idea that the goal is to have a perfectly regulated nervous system all the time which is just the same as trying to be perfectly happy or calm all the time.

There's no escape from the human experience. You're going to experience great joy and pleasure and delight in your life and also sorrow and grief and misery sometimes no matter what the circumstances of your life are.

So myth number two, this kind of middle place is that if you can just get self-love right or love yourself enough, that's going to be your exit ramp off the human experience. that's the place you're trying to get to, to finally never feel bad. But self-love is actually about loving yourself through your whole human experience. Self-love doesn't mean, never feeling insecure. It means having a different reaction to yourself when you do feel insecure. And definitely, when you develop self-acceptance and self-love and self-compassion you feel less insecure.

If I took the amount of thoughts I used to have about all the things I hated about myself and all the anxiety and insecurity and loneliness I caused for myself and I added it all up and then I do the math now it's definitely less.

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There's a point to doing this work for sure but self-love is not a vaccine against your brain ever creating another negative emotion, including insecurity. It still pops up occasionally for me that's just part of life. What self-love does guarantee is a different reaction to your own negative emotions.

And because people are in this headspace, that's when they fall into the third myth about self-love. We believe that self-love when we finally get to self-love we're never going to feel bad again. And we're desperate to get there to get off the human experience and that's how we get to myth three which is where we start to think of self-love as a destination that we should be able to reach, a place we're going and it's taking too long to get there. That's myth three because self-love is not a destination.

Self-love is a relationship with yourself. It's not a destination that you get to, it's not a place. And it's not a state that you stay in. It's not like you can be on the road, and on the road, and on the road and then eventually, eureka, you arrive. That's not what we're talking about. We start to treat self-love like it's this milestone that once we achieve it we can just get to stay there forever. It's like you've run a marathon, now you'll always have done it. You'll never be someone who hasn't run a marathon.

Or you move to Paris now you live in Paris and that you'll never be someone who doesn't live in Paris. But self-love is not a destination. It's not a thing that you can do well enough to reach the promised land and stay there forever. It's just a relationship with yourself and like any relationship with someone you love, you will have ups and downs. There will be easier seasons and there will be harder seasons. And like any relationship with someone you love, you have to build it bit by bit through trust and compassion and time and attention.

Creating that loving relationship with yourself takes time and it's not a one and done and it's not a destination you get to, that you never ever leave

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and it's not a panacea that takes away all your negative emotions. But it is a crucial element of a happy and fulfilling life because your relationship with yourself is the longest relationship you're going to have.

And so having that relationship be mostly positive and be like any other relationship where sometimes there is conflict or insecurity or loneliness but you know how to deal with that, you know how to repair the relationship if you're mean to yourself. You know how to repair that trust with yourself. All of that is the key to being able to navigate this life, it's a more enjoyable ride of the human experience even though it is the human experience.

Alright, my friends, I cannot wait. I have so much good content recorded for these private podcasts. I'm so excited to be able to dive in with these kinds of small but deep daily lessons and teach you guys how to actually change some shit in your brain. Alright, Happy Valentine's Day, happy February ahead of time, let's make it the best one yet. I'll see you guys there.

If you're loving what you're learning on the podcast, you have got to come check out *The Feminist Self-Help Society*. It's our newly revamped community and classroom where you get individual help to better apply these concepts to your life along with a library of next level blow your mind coaching tools and concepts that I just can't fit in a podcast episode. It's also where you can hang out, get coached and nerd out about all things thought work and feminist mindset with other podcast listeners just like you and me.

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